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SERB WAR AIMS

The central Serb goals in Bosnia have been and remain the destruction of Bosnia as a viable independent state and the incorporation of Serb-claimed regions into a greater Serbia. The current Bosnian Serb offensive in eastern Bosnia should be seen in this context; it appears aimed at eliminating the few remaining Muslim enclaves in the region. Barring the introduction of an external force strong enough to compel them to desist, the Serbs are unlikely to stop until they have achieved that goal. If the Vance-Owen talks have had an influence on Serb actions, it more likely is in persuading them to accelerate the pace of their efforts to achieve their goals before a settlement is reached.

The Serbs almost certainly have no illusions that Vance and Owen would formally alter their proposed map to give the entire Drina River valley to the Serbs. Nevertheless, the commanders undoubtedly believe that a successful offensive will create a fait accompli and make it more difficult for an international force to implement a Vance-Owen-style accord.

- Elimination of the few small remaining eastern Bosnian Muslim enclaves would make Serb control in the region a reality, both militarily and demographically.
- Few Muslim survivors of ethnic cleansing are likely to return to the Drina River Valley, even if an international force is in place.
- Moreover, Belgrade has a strategic interest in preventing easy communication between Bosnian Muslims and Muslims in the Sandjak region of Serbia, which borders on eastern Bosnia.

In addition, a number of military objectives are served by the offensive.

- The Serbs are eliminating a residual threat in a region where they established overall control long ago. Muslim forces operating from several pockets in eastern Bosnia carried out a series of attacks against the Serbs in December and January. They made some significant gains, and--according to Serb claims--committed atrocities before being pushed back.

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- By responding to the December-January attacks with overwhelming force, the Serbs also hope to deter similar attacks elsewhere and convince the Muslims that they cannot hope to achieve military success.
- The offensive has a momentum of its own. Not having met any force capable of defeating them in eastern Bosnia, the Serbs have kept moving and taking territory.

As for Sarajevo, the Bosnian Serbs almost certainly do not intend to occupy the entire city. It has little inherent military value, and we believe the Serbs have neither the manpower nor the will to conduct house-to-house fighting in a final battle for the city.

- The Serbs almost certainly believe it is critical to destroy Sarajevo as a symbol of a multi-ethnic state.
- They also may hope that increased military pressure on the city might provoke Izetbegovic to pull out of the talks, thereby eliminating the risk that the Serbs will be the lone hold-out against Vance-Owen.
- The recent attacks on Western suburbs probably are aimed at consolidating Serb control over the western approaches to the city, particularly the main access road from the airport on which all UN convoys travel.
- The Serbs probably also are trying to seal off a possible Muslim breakout route toward Mt. Igman, southwest of the airport.

The Serb actions reflect political reality; there is little doubt that Serb "agreement" to a version of the Vance-Owen plan will not imply compliance with either the letter or spirit of an accord. The Serbs are not likely to withdraw from any territory they occupy barring the arrival of an international force able and willing to compel them to do so. They will cite violations by factions aligned with the Croats and Muslims--which are a near certainty--to justify their own noncompliance.

- The Serbs almost certainly do not believe that the international community will be willing to make the long-term commitment of large forces that would be necessary to hold Bosnia together.
- Rather than directly challenge such a force, the Serbs are likely to grudgingly comply, but encourage guerilla attacks for which they can deny responsibility (the same tactic is likely from the Muslims).

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Given the Serbs' determination to settle the "Serbian question"-- and their belief that the international community lacks the ability and will to make a long-term commitment to Bosnia--altering Serb calculations will not be easy.

- Indications that the arms embargo would be lifted could encourage a more cooperative attitude, but it will be difficult to obtain passage of such a measure in the UN Security Council. The Russians and many Europeans will warn that increasing the flow of arms will jeopardize UN troops and humanitarian operations.
- A serious tightening of sanctions would put more pressure on Serbian President Milosevic, but also would probably radicalize Serbian public opinion and increase the influence of ultranationalists. There also would be a need for markedly higher assistance to front line states such as Macedonia, Romania, and Bulgaria to gain their cooperation.

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